

The Soviet ABM: Two Impressions

Move for Accord To Bar Race in Missiles Hinted

By Chalmers M. Roberts
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The Soviet Union has conducted test firings of missiles for its new defensive anti-missile system but there is still doubt in Washington that the Kremlin is deploying a full-scale defense shield.

The Soviet anti-ballistic missile (ABM) tests met with considerable success against Russian missiles as the target.

Officials concerned with this problem say that the available facts go well beyond what Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara on Dec. 11 publicly denigrated as "considerable evidence" of Soviet ABM deployment.

Other officials in the diplomatic field, however, believe that a final Kremlin decision on full-scale deployment probably has yet to be made.

The problem is now before the National Security Council and clearly is an agonizing one to President Johnson.

There are hints, but no more, that Mr. Johnson might approach the Soviet Union before any decision on an American ABM system is taken to see whether an agreement might be reached to avoid such a new round in the arms race.

The idea of such an agreement has long been discussed both publicly and privately. Some unofficial discussions between Soviet and American scientists have taken place but there is no evidence of anything more than far from probing by American officials at the formal diplomatic level. Indications are that there has been no Soviet response to any such limited overtures.

Near Astronomical Cost

Costs of an American ABM system are close to astronomical, an estimated \$30 billion over five years even without a fallout shelter system and few believe the final figure would not be considerably higher.

There is as yet no indication of a presidential decision to go ahead and McNamara reportedly remains highly skeptical of taking such a step.

McNamara spoke of Soviet action "to initiate deployment of such a system." Other officials say there are now available photographs, presumably from American reconnaissance satellites, showing cleared sites, concrete and radar work and other evidence.

These officials say earlier assessments that the activity might be related to new Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) emplacements or those for anti-aircraft weapons have now been discarded. They say there is no longer any confusion between the ABM and ICBM work.

Aside from the question of how far the Soviet ABM system is going, the critical issue as seen here is: how good will it be?

Thus, when speaking of the Soviet tests, the dates of which they would not disclose, some officials are skeptical but others believe the system is quite effective.

The skeptics recall Soviet boasts about their SA2 missiles which have failed to live up to expectations when used against American planes over North Vietnam.

The Soviet excuse, according to word reaching Washington, is that the SA2s are being fired by Vietnamese crews and not by superior Russian crews but this is discounted here.

McNamara insists that American missiles can get through any conceivable Soviet ABM system. Not unless the Soviets have a defensive missile—both systems have nuclear warheads—for every one of the approximately 1000 land-based and 600 sea-based American missiles would the Soviets have a really effective system, officials say.

Furthermore, the American system includes not only various secret penetration aids but is moving into the multiple warhead era.

Those who do not believe the Kremlin has yet made a decision to go all-out in ABM defense feel that what has been done so far is a factor of the post-Khrushchev leadership in Moscow.

Viewed as Weaker

These officials view the post-Khrushchev political leadership of Leonid Brezhnev and Alexei Kosygin as weaker than Khrushchev's. Thus, they argue, the military voice in Kremlin decisions is stronger than in Khrushchev's era, but probably not strong enough to force a full-scale ABM decision.

Some officials believe that in making a decision for either partial or full-scale deployment the political leaders are thinking essentially in terms of military defense with little regard to the reaction such decisions cause in the United States.

Officials here, however, are very conscious of this latter factor. The Pentagon leadership recognizes that it is likely to be under considerable fire from Congress if it does not start deployment of Nike-X, the American ABM system long under development.

Civilian Experts Are Neither Surprised Nor Upset

By Stephen S. Rosenfeld
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The civilian experts who keep an eagle eye on Soviet military doings are neither surprised nor upset that the Soviet Union has begun to build a defense against American missiles.

They have advised policy makers that the Russians are not constructing an impenetrable shield, that they won't be able to wield it for strategic blackmail, and that it won't make the balance of terror more dangerous or unstable.

"Let's face it," said one expert, alluding to the 3 or 4 to 1 American lead in intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), "if we'd been in their position, we'd have done a lot more. It's quite understandable why they are doing what they are, and somewhat surprising they're not doing more."

"Psychologically," he said, "there is a new element to deploying ABM (an antiballistic missile system), but it is justifiable in their terms. Their choice of an offensive-defensive mix, rather than all offensive, is one of the choices they might have made."

The United States is now weighing whether to match the Soviet ABM program. Its first reaction, announced last month when the Soviet deployment was revealed, was to move ahead on the Poseidon, an offensive missile designed to penetrate the Soviet shield being built.

"The Russians are extremely defense-minded," said another official, citing their extremely large spending on anti-aircraft defense even after the United States began shifting its nuclear payload to missiles.

John R. Thomas of Research Analysis Corp., a civilian Pentagon offshoot, pointed to the same "defense-mindedness" in a study of Soviet missile defense last year.

He said the Russians are as interested in "winning" a possible war by defending their own political centers as by striking against U.S. missile forces.

"Soviet failure to build a large ICBM force during the early 1960s, contrary to U.S. expectations, would seem further to reflect Soviet 'bias' for defense," he said. He noted that Moscow has trained only a "minimum" missile deterrent against the United States.

Experts differ a little on what led former Premier Khrushchev to push the ABM programs whose fruits are now being deployed: whether the spur was the 1961-62 frustration over Berlin and Cuba, or simply a continuing bedrock urge for strategic advance.

They are one, however, in thinking that Moscow doesn't expect to convert its missile shield automatically into political capital, in Berlin or elsewhere. Too many other factors enter in, they say, and anyway defense is on Moscow's mind.

The current Soviet effort is "almost exclusively" directed against the United States, not China, it is said.

The basis of American strategy is that superiority begets security, and U.S. strategists reject the notion that this country would be safer if the Russians felt more secure. Yet that notion was cited by one official who said the Soviet ABM deployment might help ease nuclear tension.

Thomas figured Moscow would avoid the economic dislocation, and the consequent political scramble, of an ABM crash program. There is, in fact, a tendency to think Moscow can pay for an extensive system without backbreaking strain. (The cost of a sophisticated American deployment is put at \$30-40 billion.)

The delay in Moscow's formulation of the 1966-70 economic plan is attributed partly to ABM pressures but otherwise the record grain harvest has eased the pinch this year and there have been no telltale signs of budgetary inflighting.

One expert noted that since the Kremlin is improving offensive strength at the same time, it is pressuring the missile defense, it is obviously not sacrificing the former.

In recent years the Russians have edged toward a "flexible response" posture, adding power at the "conventional warfare" end as reasons behind it: well as the strategic end. This is considered another area where it will be hard to make cuts to pay for ABM.

That leaves chiefly civilian programs—either consumer goods or industrial growth—as the likeliest vic-

tims of big ABM spending, but no unusual suffering there has yet been detected.

The Soviet Union is pushing the extensive fallout shelter program that has been recommended as part of an American ABM system. Its shelter work is termed "marginal"—outfitting basements in some new buildings, first-aid training and the like. Subways in Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev are already equipped as shelters.

The low-key shelter program is part of the pattern of discretion in which the Russians are moving ahead on ABM. For instance the Soviet press has yet to report the deployment Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara revealed a month ago.

Anticipating this discretion in his paper last year, Thomas suggested these:

- To avoid panicking the United States into a crash program that might neutralize Soviet progress.

- To allow the Soviet Union a slower, easier and cheaper deployment.

- To get political and psychological mileage out of a small deployment, by playing on American fears of an invulnerable Soviet shield.

Thomas noted that a nation with ABM is hard put to demonstrate its prowess and thereby earn credibility for it. By contrast, the Russians demonstrate ICBMs by roping off a target area in the Pacific 8000 miles away. He suggested that they might try to "leak" word of ABM effectiveness through East Europeans.